

## A STRATEGY FOR WORKING ENVIRONMENT EFFORTS UP TO 2020 - RISK-BASED INSPECTIONS (DENMARK)

**Type of initiative:** Inspections

**Timeframe:** 2012 – 2020

### 1 Description of the initiative

#### 1.1 Introduction

In 2011, the Danish government (Denmark's Liberal Party and the Conservative People's Party), the Social Democratic Party, the Danish People's Party and the Danish Social Liberal Party agreed on an ambitious strategy for the work environment to 2020. The strategy aimed to strengthen health and safety initiatives in order to provide more people with a good and long working life, by targeting health and safety initiatives at those enterprises with the most significant problems and by promoting the prevention of poor health and safety practices as a means of gaining a competitive advantage. The parties agreed to establish a series of objectives and priorities for the work environment and to support these efforts through 19 specific initiatives. These were supplemented with an additional 15 initiatives in a 2015 agreement between the Danish government (the Danish Social Democrats and the Danish Social Liberal Party), Denmark's Liberal Party, the Danish People's Party and the Conservative People's Party.

The 2011 and 2015 strategies established a series of priorities and objectives to improve the working environment in Danish enterprises and to fight absenteeism. The Work Environment Authority (WEA) and all other stakeholders, including the Work Environment Council (WEC) and the sectoral WECs, are required to contribute by the means and instruments at their disposal (e.g. inspections, campaigns and dissemination of information) to reaching the objectives. In addition, the WEA and the social partners are expected to coordinate their efforts concerning the initiatives they launch within the priority areas.

#### 1.2 Aims of the initiative

The overall goal of the strategy is to create a good working environment to help improve safety and health at work, and to ensure a long working life for the individual with the least possible absenteeism due to health problems.

The parties to the 2011 strategy agreed to focus on three areas:

- accidents at work;
- the psychosocial working environment;
- musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

In these three areas, the following objectives for 2020 have been agreed:

- The number of serious accidents at work will be reduced by 25 %, in terms of the number of employees involved.
- The number of employees reporting psychological overload will be reduced by 20 %.
- The number of employees experiencing MSDs will be reduced by 20 %.

### 1.3 Organisations involved

The initiative involved the Danish Working Environment Authority (WEA), Working Environment Council (WEC, comprising representatives of the social partners, namely the Confederation of Danish Employers and the Central Labour Organisation), the sectoral WECs, the National Board of Industrial Injuries, the National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NRCWE) and the social partners.

### 1.4 What was done and how

The strategy acknowledges that a safe and healthy working environment leads to a decrease in absenteeism due to sickness, and also results in people staying longer in the labour market.

The strategy also acknowledges the important role of the WEA and the inspections carried out by it to improve the work environment in enterprises and it introduces the principle of risk-based inspections in two tiers. The use of risk-based inspections is one of the 19 initiatives defined in the strategy to support the achievement of the objectives. According to this principle inspections have been targeted at those enterprises that have the most issues relating to the working environment, including the psychosocial aspects. The number of inspections was increased for these enterprises.

Enterprises are selected for a risk-based inspection using an index model, which contains several indicators to identify those enterprises that have the most serious health and safety issues. Companies are allocated points for each of the indicators, and those with the highest number of total points are selected for inspection. The WEA and the occupational safety and health (OSH) committees in these companies coordinate their efforts in carrying out risk-based inspections/supervision.

Approximately 24,500 inspection visits were planned each year in the years from 2012 onwards. Every year, approximately 14,000 enterprises were selected for inspection as a result of their high scores in the index model, while another approximately 10,500 enterprises were selected following a spot check. Thus, approximately 55 % of inspections were risk-based and 45 % were of enterprises that were randomly selected.

The general risk-based inspections carried out in these companies were extended such that a thorough and targeted review of the company's ergonomic working environment (covering MSD risks) and psychosocial working environment was implemented.

The WEA has estimated that all companies with 2.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) workers or more will be inspected at least once during the period from 2012 to 2019.

Spot checks have also been made each year of an average of approximately 2,500 enterprises with 1.0 to 1.9 FTE workers. This means that approximately half of the enterprises in this group will be inspected before the end of 2019.

As a general rule, the WEA contacts enterprises 1-4 months prior to inspection to give them the opportunity to solve any working environment issues before the inspection. Enterprises are not informed of the actual inspection date (i.e. the inspection is unannounced).

The WEA prepares 'prevention packages', consisting of written guides to in-house risk assessments and developing practical interventions to reduce musculoskeletal strain, accidents or other typical work environment problems. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can apply for a prevention package and, as an innovative feature, receive compensation for the time spent on implementing the package.

## 1.5 What was achieved

The strategy was launched in 2011 and will run until 2020. Mid-term evaluations of the strategy — including the targeted inspections — were carried out in 2014 and 2017 in 36 branches <sup>(1)</sup> in the transport, construction, metals, healthcare, food and hospitality sectors. The evaluations showed a decrease in the number of serious occupational accidents, from 3.9 per year per 1,000 employees in 2011 to 3.7 in 2012 and 3.2 in 2014. The number of serious accidents per 1,000 employees varied between 3.8 and 4.3 in the period 2004-2011, with no clear trend.

The achievement of the reduction targets for psychosocial disorders and MSDs (set at 20 %) were assessed using the large questionnaire survey Working Environment and Health in Denmark, first implemented by the NRCWE in 2012. The survey is carried out in a sample taken from a total of approximately 50,000 people living in Denmark and aged between 18 and 64 years.

A physical stress index was developed to measure the reduction target for MSDs, the scores for which are based on the number of people exposed to musculoskeletal hazards at work (e.g. poor working postures, lifting heavy loads) in combination with the reported symptoms such as pain and fatigue. To reach the 20 % MSD reduction target, the percentage of employees affected in 2012, 9.7 %, needs to fall to 7.7 % in 2020. Although the percentage fell to 8.5 % in 2014, an increase was noted in 2016, to 11.1 %. The distribution by sector shows that hairdressers and workers in personal care, construction, demolition and cleaning sectors, are over-represented. It appears that the increase in the proportion of employees who fell within the index for the musculoskeletal load from 2012 to 2016 can primarily be attributed to an increase in the proportion of those who experienced fatigue after a typical working day and who felt limited in their work by pain.

The mid-term evaluation led to a new political agreement in 2015, reinforcing the strategic plan by including 15 new measures. One of the key new elements is an increase in the number of risk-based inspections, in order to reduce the number of industrial accidents and the numbers of people experiencing physical and psychological overload. The plan was to achieve this by selecting about 80 % of the enterprises chosen for annual risk-based inspections using the index model (previously, approximately 55 % of the enterprises were selected using the model), while the remainder were to be selected randomly. The new procedure is meant to prioritise enterprises that have problems in the three areas of industrial accidents, psychological strain and overload, and complaints of a musculoskeletal nature. All enterprises with temporary and changing workplaces should undergo a risk-based inspection, as should newly established enterprises with a high risk of health and safety problems. With respect to enforcement, serious violations will result in higher fines, breaches of OSH regulations will be followed up swiftly and the WEA will step up its efforts to disseminate knowledge about OSH regulations to enterprises.

Statistics show that, since the announcement of the new strategy, absences from work have fallen (i.e. between 2015 and 2016), although not substantially <sup>(2)</sup>.

## 1.6 Success factors and challenges

The strategy is a government initiative, with the social partners having an element of co-ownership through the preparatory discussions and implementation of the initiatives. The coordination of efforts between the WEA and the WEC has also proved to be important. The strategy follows the 'orchestration' approach to working environment policy, that is, a strategy where different stakeholders and activities are integrated into a joint programme. Following the orchestration approach, policy instruments are combined, and the various partners and stakeholders strive for greater collaboration and coordination. In practice, this means closer collaboration between the work environment authorities, the social partners and many other stakeholders in the OSH field.

<sup>(1)</sup> For a full overview, see the 2014 and 2017 mid-term evaluations (available at <https://docplayer.dk/17650300-Midtvejsevaluering-af-maalopfyldelsen-i-2020-strategien.html> and <https://docplayer.dk/47397747-2-midtvejsevaluering-af-maalopfyldelsen-i-strategien.html>).

<sup>(2)</sup> Statistics Denmark, 'Absence' (<https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/arbejde-indkomst-og-formue/fravaer-og-arbejdsstandsninger/fravaer>).

Orchestration can be particularly effective in reaching target groups that have previously proved difficult to reach, such as SMEs and the construction sector.

Implementation through regulation and information is not enough in itself. According to the literature, more information and guidance could be provided to those companies selected for inspection, while breaches of OSH regulations must be followed up quickly and thoroughly.

## 1.7 Transferability

The use of a systematic approach to targeted inspections, rather than relying on random inspections or responding to ad hoc complaints, is a potentially cost-beneficial approach to the use of limited inspection resources. The idea of focusing attention where it is most needed could be usefully adopted in other Member States.

In addition, the orchestration approach is innovative and readily transferable to other countries and policy areas.

## 2 Background

Data from the Eurostat Labour Force Survey ad hoc modules show that, in the 5 years from 2007 to 2013, the percentage of workers in Denmark reporting some form of MSD remained essentially unchanged, falling from 59.0 % to 57.9 %, compared with an overall EU increase from 54.2 % to 60.1 % in the same period.

National legislation in Denmark implementing the provisions of the Manual Handling Directive and the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Directive is complex, as the regulation of OSH is shared among four ministries, with separate legal acts for offshore work in relation to mineral extraction industries, shipping and fishing, and civil aviation, as well as provisions for general industry. The national provisions on manual handling generally mirror those in the directive, although their scope is broader (e.g. they encompass work in employers' private dwellings). There are no additional requirements in relation to the implementation of the DSE Directive.

Psychosocial risks are increasingly recognised as a contributory factor in respect of work-related MSDs. In Denmark, psychosocial risks are covered by the employer's general duty to ensure that working conditions are safe and do not present a risk to health. There are legal provisions in the Danish Working Environment Act, specifically in Executive Order No 559 of 17 June 2004 on the Performance of Work, that refer to psychosocial working conditions; mental health; bullying, including sexual harassment; and the employer's obligation to ensure that work does not involve a risk of harm to mental health. The psychosocial work environment has also been identified as one of the priority areas in the Danish strategy for the working environment, alongside MSDs and accidents at work.

## References and resources

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<https://amid.dk/media/2953/strategy-working-environment-efforts-2020.pdf>
- (2) Agreement between the Danish government (the Danish Social Democrats and the Danish Social Liberal Party), Denmark's Liberal Party, the Danish People's Party and the Conservative's People Party, 2015, *Stronger health and safety initiatives — everyone is entitled to a safe and healthy working environment*.
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- (4) OSH system at national level — Denmark, OSHwiki:  
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- (8) Danish Working Environment Authority, *Opgørelse af belastningsindeks for psykisk arbejdsmiljø og muskelskelet Midtvejsevaluering af målopfyldelsen i 2020-strategien* [Calculation of load index for psychosocial work environment and musculoskeletal load mid-term evaluation of target fulfilment in the 2020 strategy]. Available in Danish at: <https://docplayer.dk/26276146-Opgoerelse-af-belastningsindeks-for-psykisk-arbejdsmiljoe-og-muskelskelet-midtvejsevaluering-af-maalopfyldelsen-i-2020-strategien.html>
- (9) Danish Working Environment Authority, 2013, *Målemetode til vurdering af reduktion af muskel-skelet-overbelastede og psykisk overbelastede i 2020arbejdsmiljøstrategien* [Measurement method for assessing the reduction of musculoskeletal - and psychological overload in the 2020 Work Environment Strategy].
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